

THE FAIRFAX AREA AGENCY ON AGING PRESENTS CAREGIVER'S CORNER ONLINE JUNE 2005

Caregiver's Corner Online is an electronic newsletter produced by the Fairfax Area Agency on Aging (AAA) with funding from the National Family Caregiver Support Program of the Older Americans Act. Our goal is to send you information to support you as a caregiver for an older adult.

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1. TRAVELING WITH A PERSON WITH ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE, by Lin Noyes Simon, PhD, RN, Former Clinical Director, Alzheimer's Family Day Center.

While difficult to talk in generalities about traveling with people with Alzheimer's disease (AD) since each person with Alzheimer's disease is different, here are some suggestions that might make your travel safer and more pleasant.

****Register with Safe Return --** Traveling increases the chances of becoming separated from your loved one so create a safety net for yourself by registering your loved one with Safe Return through the Alzheimer's Association. Call 1-888-572-8566 (toll-free) well in advance of your trip and register your loved one.

****Plan in detail --** Try and plan your trip with as few interruptions to normal waking, sleeping and eating times as possible since changes in routine can cause disorientation. As for telling your loved one about the travel plans, use your past experiences with the person to guide you. If you know telling him/her in advance will cause numerous questions and confusion, just give information on a need to know basis.

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****Medications --** Count your pills and make sure you both have enough for the duration of the trip. Some people even ask the MD for a prescription to take with them just in case the pills get lost or misplaced. Be sure and take the name and number of the doctors, a list of medications, and medical conditions for which you are being treated in case an emergency arises away from home.

****Plan your itinerary carefully** so your own anxiety can be held in check. If you become rattled, so will your loved one. If you travel frequently, get used to wearing a distinctive hat or carry a brightly colored bag so that you can be easily recognized by your loved one.

****Name badges for both --** Make sure BOTH of you WEAR a name badge with identification/information at all times during the trip. This will be vital if something should happen to you or if the two of you become separated. Your badge should display your name and then behind the badge include:

- Itinerary;
- Emergency contact info;
- Health alerts for both of you (including doctor's name and number);
- Original ID's for both of you, passports if needed;
- And a message to this effect: "I am traveling with (name) who has Alzheimer's disease and is dependent on me for safety and care. Please do not leave him/her alone for any reason. Please call (contact name) if I am unable to take care of him." Your loved one's badge should contain similar information including a copy of his/her ID and info about you. (You should carry the originals so you know where they are at all times.) "I have memory loss and my wife, _____, is my caregiver. Please find her; if we have gotten separated she will be looking for me if she is able."

****Car Trips --** Pack the car for emergencies, include water and food in case you get stuck, a cell phone for emergencies, and have the car serviced before you leave. Plan to drive for about two hours and then take at least a stretch-break. The trip may take a little longer overall but stopping and stretching helps circulation and may decrease restlessness of your passenger.

****Plane Trips --** Try for non-stop routes. If you have to change planes, ask customer service for a cart to take you both to the next gate for the connecting flight. Don't count on the person's cooperation to walk quickly or hurry if flights are delayed. Tell the customer service person and boarding gate attendants that your companion has Alzheimer's disease and may need more help and/or more time. Don't hesitate to pre-board. Have your ground transportation arranged and waiting for you if at all possible after you have picked up your luggage. Keep all your trip contact names and numbers

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handy so that you don't have to search through bags or suitcases to find info you may need in a hurry. In this age of tighter security, you don't want to lose your loved one while you are having your shoes checked so tell the security guard your companion has AD and can't be left alone.

****Train trips --** Tell the porter that you need extra time to board and seats near the handicapped bathroom in the train car. Carry your own snacks and drinks (water and juice) in small cartons.

****Public Restrooms --** Using toilets in public places can be difficult. Save yourselves from embarrassment by telling the store attendant that your loved one has AD and you must help him/her. Usually people, even strangers will help you stand by the restroom door while you give assistance. Don't rely on "Wait right here" directions to your companion, especially in a different and busy environment of a terminal.

****Hotel/Motel Rooms --** Orient your loved one to the room and check to see if there is a room where your loved one can see the toilet from his/her bed. You may want to purchase a portable alarm for the motel room door so you can sleep confidently and hear if the person tries to leave during the night. At night, keep the bathroom door open and a light on to facilitate finding the toilet. Remember that the person may need additional cueing from you in new surroundings and that the calmer you can stay and the less hurried, the more calm and cooperative your loved one will be able to be.

Alzheimer's Family Day Center, a not-for-profit organization, provides a wide range of services for people with Alzheimer's and their caregivers including adult day health care, training for caregivers, support groups and preventative activities. For more information call 703-204-4664. Special thanks to our Wednesday morning family support group for sharing their valuable travel experiences contained in this article.

2. MAKING NURSING HOME VISITS A MORE MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE by C.S. Manifold, author of the question and answer book "Knowing Me, Knowing You, A Biography of You and Your Loved Ones."

Summertime is here, and there may be extra opportunities to visit with loved ones. Whether you are a caregiver of an older adult, or visiting on an occasional basis, these ideas may be useful. For many of us, visiting a loved one in a nursing home or assisted living can be a challenging task. We may feel pressured to make enjoyable conversation, and just don't know where to begin. Prior to your next visit, jot down a few questions to ask. You may just find the roots of a more stimulating conversation, a conversation that will be both rewarding and enlightening. Asking questions can lead to a greater understanding and appreciation of the people we love. The use of

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questions to stimulate conversation is a time-tested method; however, in addition to generating meaningful discussions and sharing great stories, questions can enlighten us in many other ways. For example, we may find we are learning of new rewarding hobbies, interesting events, and great travel destinations. Even more importantly, to those in unfamiliar places away from their homes and loved ones, questions show an in-depth interest in self and life, helping to increase feelings of self-worth and ease feelings of loneliness.

Visits to the nursing home or hospital can be especially tough on young people. If you are taking a younger person along to visit an older loved one, ask the child to think of a question or two to ask. They might ask about what life was like when their loved one was a child or what they might have done for entertainment. This type of conversation will make the child feel included, and may even create a bond that will carry through to the next visit. A few questions you might ask your loved one include:

- Who are your favorite singers/musicians or actors/actresses?
- Have you ever met someone famous? If so, describe.
- What are your favorite travel destinations?
- Can you tell me about your wedding day?
- What are your favorite foods/desserts/drinks?
- What were your favorite childhood activities?
- Do you believe in ghosts/UFO's? Explain your answer.

Try to present the questions in a conversational manner -- if your loved one does not appear interested in the question, move on. Don't ever try to pry, and be careful not to make them feel uncomfortable. Some people will enjoy talking about certain aspects of their life, while they may shy away from other topics. Just follow their cues.

Remember, this exercise is about bonding and communicating. Also remember that asking open-ended questions, rather than those requiring a yes-no answer, will spur conversation. Additionally, for those who are afflicted in a way that may limit responses, these questions will reinforce your own feelings of being connected. In the late stages of his life, my grandfather would often appear to be staring off into space. When he would answer a question with a yes/no response, it wasn't readily apparent that he was actually communicating with us. But there was little question of communication when he responded "Chocolate Ice Cream," to the question "What is your favorite dessert?"

I treasure the memories of my grandparents, but I wish I had more of their memories, or the answers to specific questions about their lives. Once they can no longer tell their stories or respond to questions, the experiences are lost to the next generation. Asking questions now will prevent you from one day wishing you had inquired a little more, rather than passing time talking about the weather.

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In the end, you will have had an enjoyable visit with your loved one and you may have learned a thing or two about life and yourself.

Source: To learn more about C.S. Manifold, the author of the question and answer book "Knowing Me, Knowing You, A Biography of You and Your Loved Ones," and his project to raise money to help find a cure for Alzheimer's disease or to purchase his book, please visit www.CSManifold.com.

3. CAREGIVER SEMINARS, FALL SERIES.

The Fairfax Caregiver Seminar Consortium (FCSC) is busy at work planning the fall series of caregiver seminars. The caregiver seminars will be announced in the "Golden Gazette," on the Area Agency on Aging's website at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/service/aaa, and in a future edition of Caregiver's Corner Online. We appreciate all the feedback we received from those of you who attended the seminars in the past and hope to see you at a seminar or two, or three this fall.

4. MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR.

I will be retiring from the Fairfax Area Agency on Aging at the end of June so this will be the last edition of Caregiver's Corner Online that I have the pleasure of editing. The newsletter will continue, but it might skip a month until my replacement arrives.

5. PREVIOUS EDITIONS OF CAREGIVER'S CORNER ONLINE NEWSLETTER ARE NOW AVAILABLE.

Current and past editions of the Caregiver's Corner Online newsletter (December 2004 through May 2005) are available online at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/service/aaa/caregivers_corner_nl.htm.

Please note that these items are included for informational purposes only and do not imply endorsement by the Fairfax Area Agency on Aging or Fairfax County Government.

For further information, please contact an Aging Information Specialist at the Fairfax Area Agency on Aging (telephone: 703-324-7948; TTY 703-449-1186 or e-mail: fairfax_aaa@fairfaxcounty.gov). Visit our website at: www.fairfaxcounty.gov/service/aaa.